



# IN BED WITH KEROUAC

BRENDAN SLATER

Introduction by Michael McClintock



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## **In Bed With Kerouac — Brendan Slater**

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## **Foreword By Michael McClintock**

*President, Tanka Society of America (2004-2010)  
Tanka Editor, Notes from the Gean*

This is Brendan Slater's first collection of contemporary English language tanka, haiku, and haibun (prose and haiku). The poems are set in a world remote from the early and Heian-era poetry (waka) of a thousand years ago out of which tanka emerged, remote also from the haiku and haibun of the famed Basho of 17th century Japan.

Remote, but not unrelated: These poems have long roots, subterranean connections, drawing from ancient sources. In that, they are like the dandelion, a weed, and their "flower" fragile and humble, also like the dandelion, with its hair-like parachute balls and wind-aided dispersal.

In effect, this book is Slater's "Dandelion Sutra" --- this is not the title but my impression of the work as a whole.

In Bed with Kerouac is dedicated to the American writer Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), who struggled with the same demons, addictions, failings, and interminable battles with self, impulse, and compulsion, as Slater describes for us here.

This would be a book of despair, were it not for the healing and rebuilding hidden like seed in its rhythms, images, and compact language.

How fortunate all of us would be, to have the same courage, to make songs and insist that songs prevail.

*California, August 2012*



blinded  
by a glint of sunlight  
from my jimmy—  
the cash box opens  
another day of IOUs

*squashed tomatoes  
and stew  
a noose  
around your neck  
I kick away the chair*

she hates it  
how I cannot control  
my compulsions  
a perfectly straight line  
of empty pill bottles

after a day  
sliding from bar to bar  
with my new friend  
he pulls from his rucksack  
six inches of cold steel

I'm uneasy  
on the bus ride  
to the clinic—  
in the rush hour crowd  
just a hint of myself

in the waiting room  
I translate the sign  
Addiction Care—  
suddenly aware of the habit  
of laughing at my own jokes

at a dark table  
in a dirty tin ashtray  
an unsmoked cigarette—  
I close my eyes and become  
someone else, somewhere else

forming  
atom by atom  
deep in my gut  
a blood diamond  
for my funeral

a mattress  
on a concrete floor  
since I sold my bed  
no-one comes to visit me  
not even in my dreams

## **Her**

It's a simple recipe if you have enough flair to  
overuse the cumin, underuse the lemon juice and  
add just the right amount of her essence caught on  
a warm summer-night breeze. Stir until morning.

finished  
the washing up  
I look for you  
in the dark places  
of your absence

## **Something in her eyes called Nothing**

I grab my coat, take her by the arm and lead her to  
a metal staircase tucked around a corner in the  
backs. We wait in the dark.

face of an angel  
under my dealer's hoody—  
stars are made from rock

city night  
the gangster  
tightens his hood

no moon  
i explore  
my inner space

spring round the corner  
even the ice  
is black

no-morning  
the cold  
blue

first light  
my last Rizla  
taken by the breeze

dawn breaks  
between her excuses  
ash in my coffee

ploughed earth  
the devil's horns  
in a cloud

the stubborn bitch curls in her hair Siberian wind

## Dry

TV's not up to much—I google Peter Sutcliffe for a half hour or so. The second-hand two-cup peculator gurgles from the kitchen. My cats sleep through it like they do most days. I chew my pills, wash them down with a gulp of coffee, lie back and wait for it to pass.

this thirst  
that came with the rain  
lingers long  
after the wind blows  
the pavement dry

## **Someone**

Take me out and shoot me in the back of the head.  
The council will clean up the blood.

light  
at 5am  
the bin wagon

## Toilet roll and lager

The shop opens at 8am. I'm the first at the till with a packet of toilet rolls and my can of lager—neither embarrasses me.

she tells my age  
by the rings round my eyes  
first spring day

**&&**

I work the night with my hands over the cliff's  
edge-a-ram bleats about rising^sea levels out  
a.cross in green\*neon lightens the load of my  
guilt=demands through the letter box me into a  
corner shop selling up the River Trent™

my cigarette {  
half full {  
    my glass {}  
} of wine }  
half smoked

**My**

wrath and spittle  
a seed  
lost to the night

On the back seat creeping forward.

## **When**

It's when the bus rounds this bend on  
Coevordenweg my heart sinks as I think of the  
grotty little flat we shared when you were still my  
wife and we were unhappy together rather than  
apart.

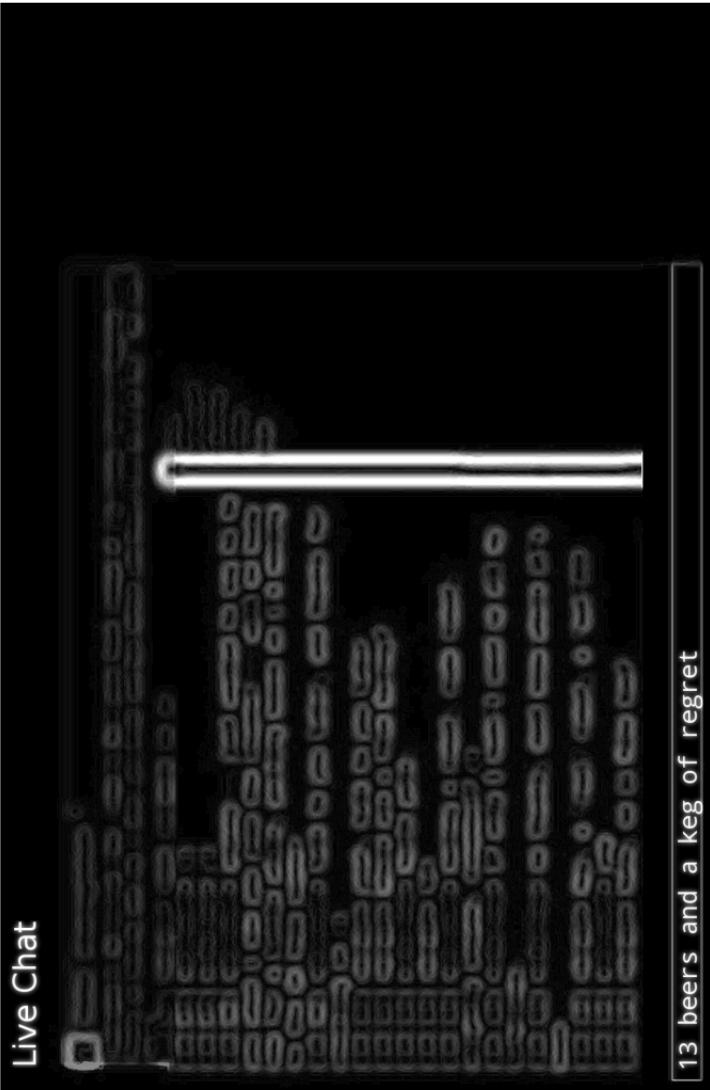
T-shirt  
and cut-off jeans  
summer rain

every woman  
I see these days  
is an urban fox  
dodging traffic to feed  
on the scraps of my heart

nothing to do  
but lie on my back  
in this single bed  
there's no empty space to fill  
just the coldness of the wall

in time  
the cold sun  
will warm . . .  
until then I'll make do  
with the fire in your eyes

roaming  
the shallow wood  
we used to sleep in  
I want to burn  
the whole thing down

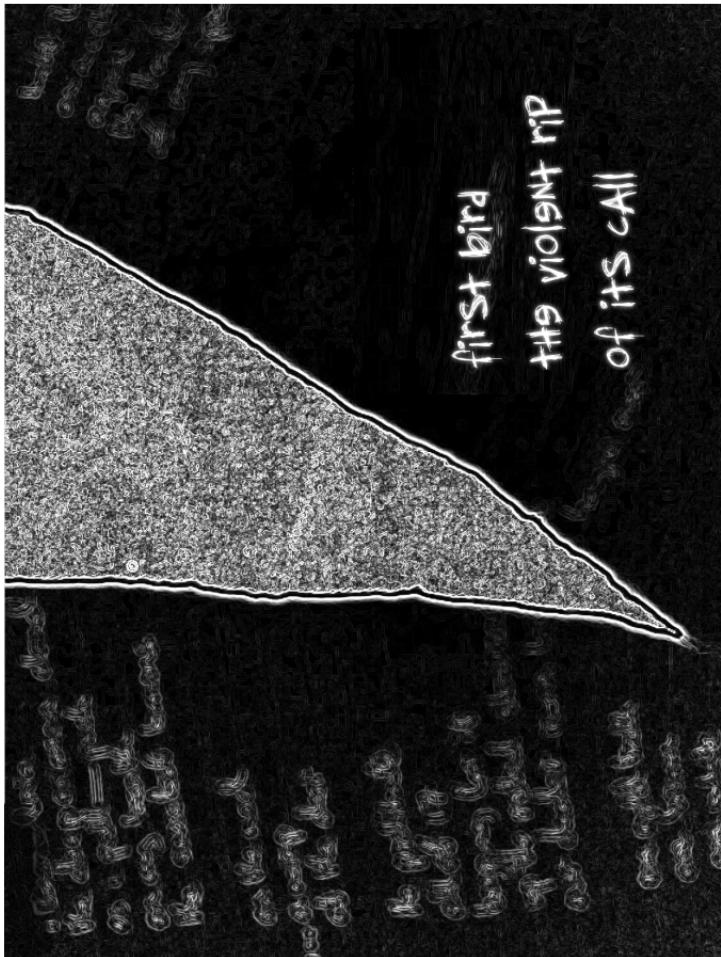


Live Chat

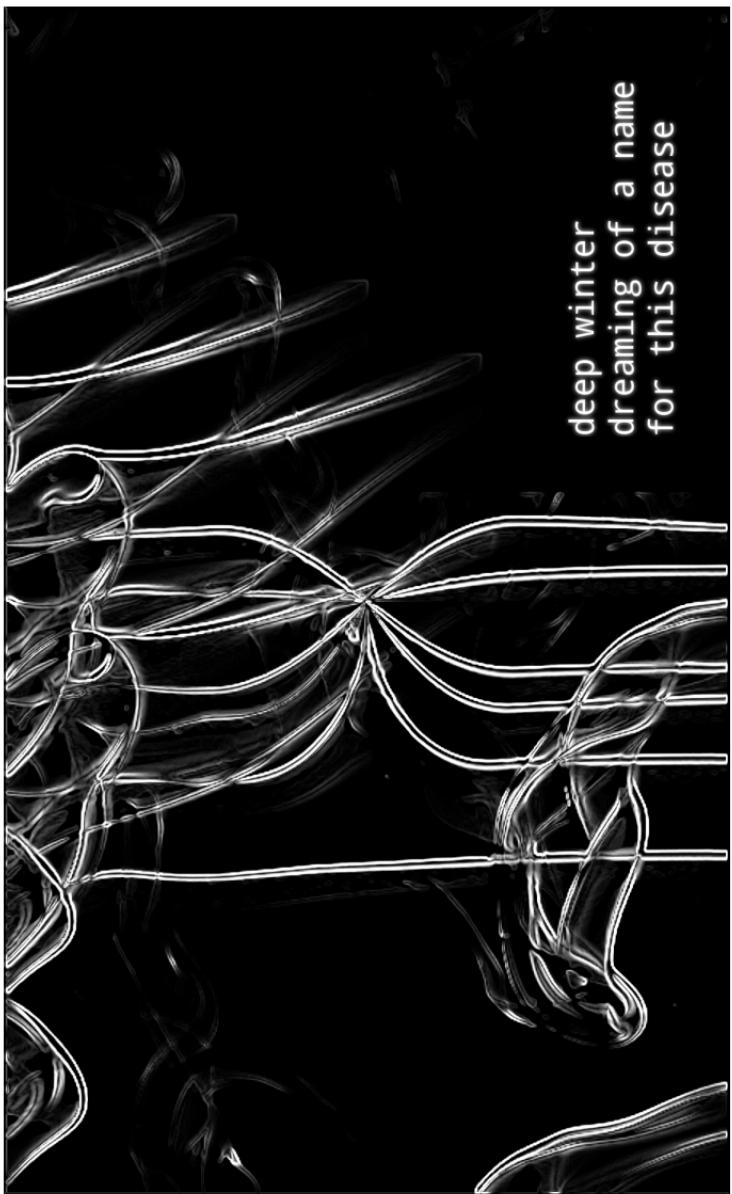
13 beers and a keg of regret



invisible presence u may disturb her

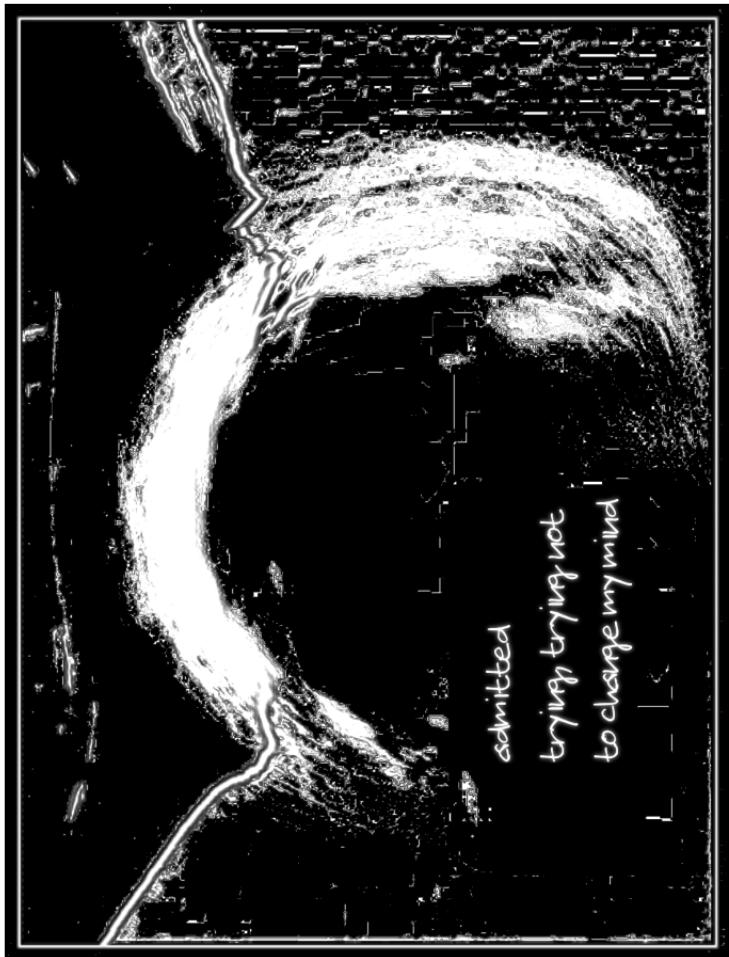


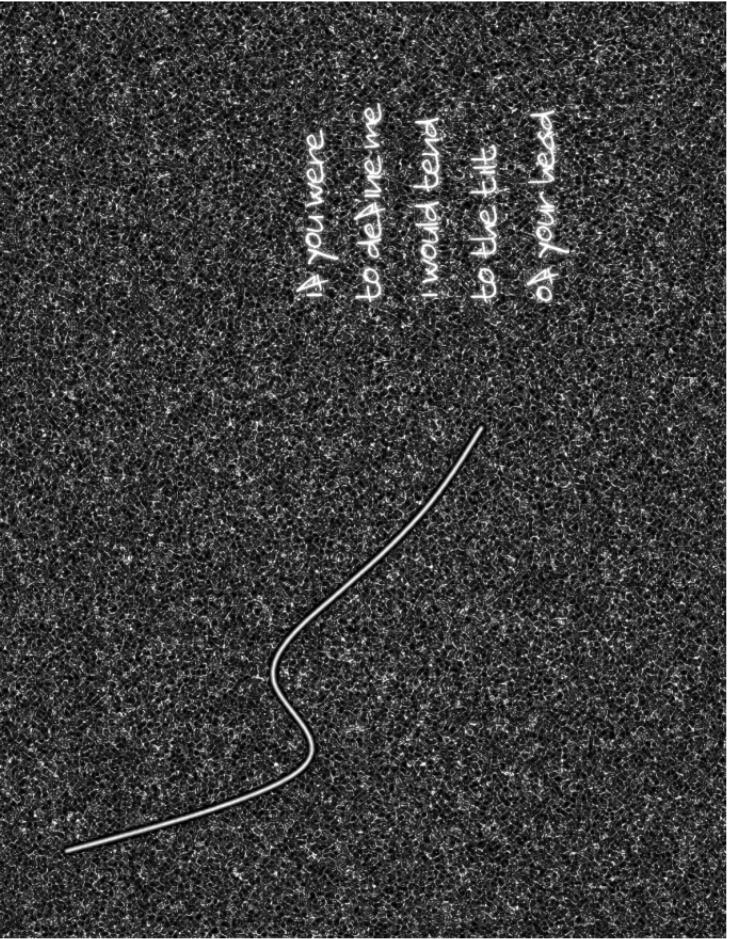
*In Bed With Kerouac*



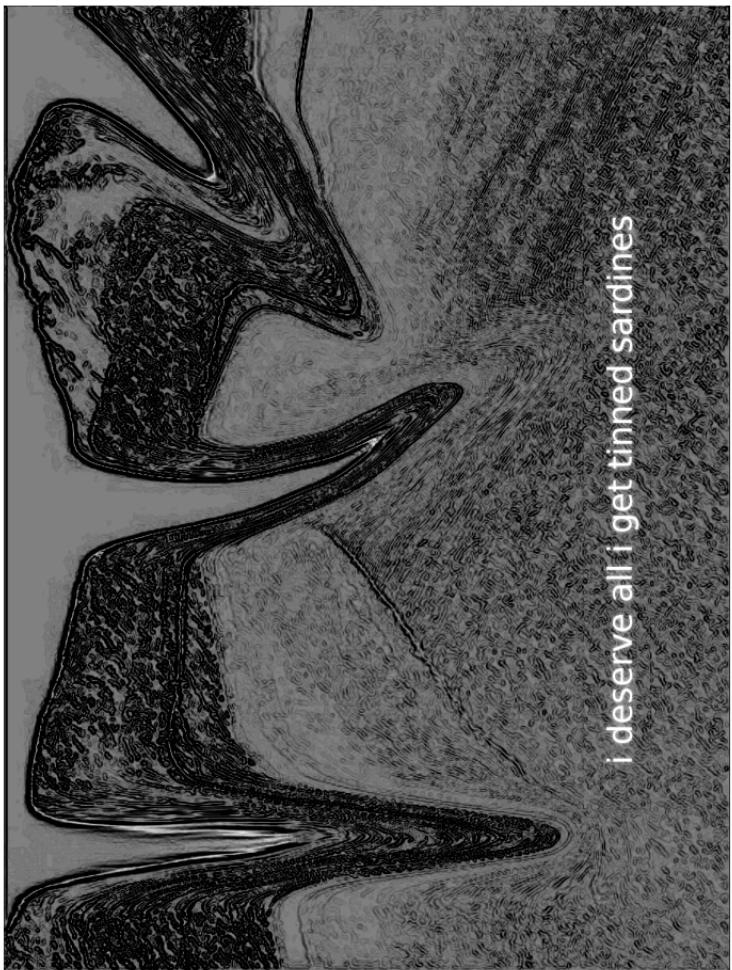
deep winter  
dreaming of a name  
for this disease



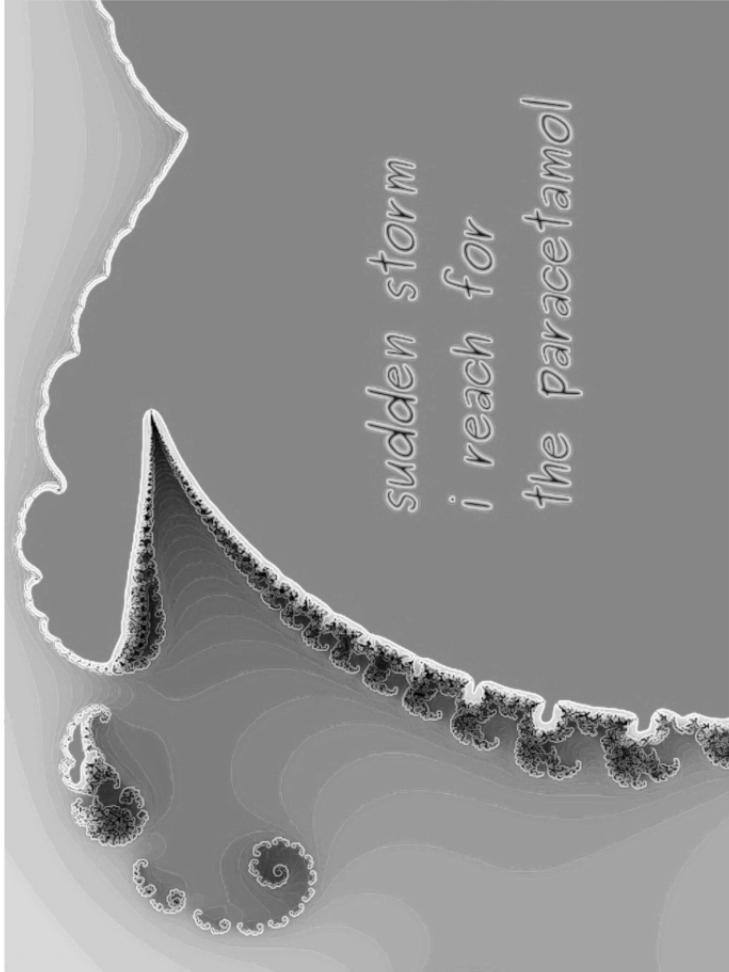




If you were  
to define me  
I would bend  
to the tilt  
of your head



i deserve all i get tinned sardines



sudden storm  
i reach for  
the paracetamol



**first**

**snow**

**my**

**is**

**Brendan**

**I'm**

**alcoholic**

**an**

**name**



rush  
the lights  
go out

summer solstice  
i touch it  
four times

days, weeks, months  
her dressing gown still hanging  
on our bedroom door

in and out  
of sleep  
her fingers  
turning pages

lost her to another nightmare

night train to Amsterdam  
our Dutch keeps running  
into English

three stops off—  
i close my eyes,  
soften the noise

before dawn  
the ancient language  
of a cat's tail

the lie  
i almost tell  
bruised ginger

winter morning  
deeper than usual  
into the city

snowfall  
filling in  
a tree

the ruins  
of the lockkeeper's house  
first few spots of rain

a spatter  
of raindrops on the window  
abnormal cells

a tanka  
in my pocket . . .  
starlight

pewter sky  
the litany  
of the ocean

## **Setting**

I've an hour's walk everyday in my plan made up by the detox staff. I'm following it pretty well, cooking, cleaning, showering, washing, household chores are all done. Fresh air heightens my senses, brightens colours of '60s shop signs running down the high street. At its end there's a cycle path leading up to the flatland—I turn a corner.

the hawk hovers—  
a patchwork of lilies  
in the drainage ditch

## **Visiting time**

In my room lying on the bed listening to voices  
from the corridor growing in volume and intensity—  
none of them I recognize. I long for one last shot in  
the arm.

my eyes open—  
the door frame  
a pale grey

tonight  
the tender moon  
is waning  
I mould myself around you  
breathe when you breathe

face to face  
in a world of sound bites  
I listen  
to what you read  
between my lines

you leave  
on the first train . . .  
I lie awake  
to stretch the night  
that little bit longer

nothing  
between us  
on the train journey home  
hiding your eyes  
with a cheap pair of shades

writing poetry  
on a mobile phone  
outside a snack bar  
the same chill wind  
that stirred our ancestors

sinking into  
the rhythm of the bus  
at dusk  
the deep blue sky  
I built as a child

shoveling  
sawdust into a barrow  
and then  
the cold rain  
of everything

crows in the road  
squabbling over  
something  
I try not to look at  
a young man's limp

at first light  
he leaves for the boat  
without me—  
I was never sure  
of my father's smile

sudden rain—  
I take his hand  
whisk him to shelter  
under the cedar tree  
my little boy and me

afraid to be  
alone with her  
alone with myself  
on a red leather sofa  
at a bar in Chinatown

i think  
we argue  
just to make up . . .  
contrails cross  
in the blue dawning sky

shifting  
in and out  
of the city  
my hunger mirrored  
in the eyes of the crowd

ur txts  
kilobytes  
of empty words  
I tap 2 samaritans  
4 3 quid an'a pouch o'burn

on Sundays  
I phone my only son  
just so he's sure  
I'm still the father  
I never was

your number  
written on my palm  
in blue—  
tonight with each cigarette  
the moon wanes a little more

## **4am**

4am  
her red eyes sparkle  
I pluck  
from my thigh  
the hair of a cat

I take a sip  
of bitter coffee  
she remembers  
how it used to be  
before computers

and rolls  
a dusty cigarette  
I cover up  
the crescent moon  
with the clouds

and then . . .  
the cat's soft purr  
the wind  
at the window

## WHAT HEAVEN 17 SAID (Finally in Sepia)

I'm good for nothing, worse at much more. I'm a  
*stalking cat slipping into your shadow. I can't see*  
*Shhh, don't look or speak, just listen. you. When I*  
*left I ripped your flesh deep cuts that exposed your*  
*worth, Let your core that had been hidden for the*  
*length of each cut. I finally saw you me whole as*  
*you never intended me to, expected me to. The life*  
*of every earthly creature is finite but once lost*  
*survives in the clatter of raindrops go*

my blood on the rocks—  
fast as it the wash rises  
into the pool

## **Credits**

Many of the poems in this book were previously published in: *Notes from the Gean*, *Ribbons*, *Atlas Poetica*, *LYNX*, *Presence*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Daily Haiga*, *Acorn*, *A Hundred Gourds*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Contemporary Haibun Online*, *Contemporary Haibun*, *Take Five*, *Electronic Poetry Network* and *Tinywords*.



# IN BED WITH KEROUAC

From the most romantic of poems to tanka where you need a sharps box; to haiku that touch you deeply in the most intimate moments of immediacy. In Bed With Kerouac is modern haiku, tanka, haibun and tanka prose, and other verse for the realities and edgy romances of this fledgling don't know where to go yet 21st Century.

—Alan Summers, *With Words*



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**poetry /  
short verse**